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# ATG Interviews Philip Blackwell

## CEO, Blackwell Limited

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

We're here today with **Philip Blackwell**, talking about **Blackwell's Book Services**, a company near and dear to many academic libraries for its focus on shelf-ready services, publisher relations, and loyalty to customers. **Philip** has been CEO of **Blackwell Limited**, **Blackwell Book Service's** parent company, since January 2000. He began his career with **B. Dalton Booksellers** in USA before returning to the UK to work in a number of roles in bookselling and publishing with **Harper Collins**, **HodderHeadline** and **Blackwell**. Prior to rejoining **Blackwell**, **Philip** was Director of the eBusiness & CRM team at **Cap Gemini Ernst & Young**. He has an MSc from **London University** and is a Sloan Fellow of the **London Business School**.



**ATG:** Let's plunge right in with the question that everyone wants answered first — what is the current status on the news we heard in late November that **Blackwell Limited** is considering selling some of its UK bookshops? And how will that affect **Blackwell's Book Services** here in the US?

**PB:** Right. A little background is in order first, I think. The **Blackwell Family** owns two independent and separate companies: **Blackwell Publishing**, the world's leading publisher for societies; and **Blackwell Limited**, the retail and library supply business. **Blackwell Limited** has asked **BDO Stoy Hayward**, a financial firm with a specialty in family businesses, to review the strategic options for its UK retail division which includes a mixed portfolio of bookshops — some flagships, like the **Broad Street** shops, and many smaller campus and specialist stores, as well as an online bookshop. **Blackwell Publishing** is not included in this at all, nor is **Blackwell's Book Services**. We expect there to be no affect on either of these. **Blackwell's** retail portfolio is only under review and this does not necessarily predicate a sale of all or part of the business.

**ATG:** Tell us a little about **Blackwell Publishing**, the other company that is part of the **Blackwell Family** holdings.

**PB:** **Blackwell Publishing** is the world's leading society publisher with over 750 journals in partnership with more than 550 academic and professional societies. A sampling of new titles introduced in 2004 includes *Headache Currents* ("fills an essential niche in the headache and migraine literature") to *New Blackfriars* ("open to the Continental hermeneutic tradition as to the analytic approach") to the *International Journal of Nautical Archeology*. I'm pleased to report that the average impact factor of **Blackwell** journals increased by 12% between 2002 and 2003, according to the ISI Citation Index. Another thing we're extremely proud of is that **Blackwell Publishing** makes

their journals available for free or at low-cost to institutions in the developing world through partnerships with **WHO Hinari**, **FAO Agora**, **INASP** and other initiatives.

**ATG:** **Blackwell's** has been celebrating its 125 year anniversary. You are a noted name in bookselling. But much has changed. Is bookselling still a viable business? Comments?

**PB:** As viable and exciting as ever, I think. The bookselling market has become increasingly competitive and aggressive following an extended period of consolidation, which in part was what prompted **Blackwell Limited** to review the marketplace. And **Blackwell's** remains committed to the bookselling industry, and in particular the library side of the industry in the Americas via **Blackwell's Book Services**. Our ability to create and maintain good working relationships with our publisher partners is of great value to the libraries we serve and to their faculty and staff. I think you'll continue to see the name **Blackwell's** affiliated with bookselling for another 125 years or so!

**ATG:** **Blackwell's Book Services** has recently reworked its invoicing and billing. Would you comment on why you did this and what the status of the process is at this time?

**PB:** In Fall 2004, **Blackwell's Book Services** implemented a new order management and distribution system to provide its customers with the long-term benefits of speedier turn around times, higher quality invoices, enhanced reporting capabilities, and increased functionality in **Collection Manager**. It was absolutely necessary to do this for several reasons. First of all, we needed to have a more robust platform to be able to take advantage of the latest efficiencies in technology. Without that, our services to customers would stagnate, and that is not what **Blackwell's** is about. And our customers' needs were changing, and we wanted to be able to respond to that by offering enhanced invoicing and billing capabilities and services. We're working side by side with our customers through this transition, and feel that our goals are being achieved.

**ATG:** I just saw an announcement about **Blackwell's** implementation of the **OpenURL** standard in **Collection Manager** — how does that really work for the busy bibliographer or selector?

**PB:** It is really very simple. With the **OpenURL** protocol in place, libraries can connect seamlessly to a variety of online resources, including bibliographic, holdings and order information of designated library and vendor partners. We think that making a better informed buy benefits everyone, allowing tight budgets to be spent most effectively. The process is easily incorporated into the library's current acquisitions and order processing workflow, eliminating extra steps. And every institution's financial information is secure in terms of what is shared in a collaborative environment.

**ATG:** I understand that **Blackwell's** has been providing funding for an Excellence in Academic Libraries Award in conjunction with **ACRL** for the past five years. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

**PB:** **Blackwell's Book Services** was looking for a way to recognize the outstanding accomplishments of community college, college and university libraries. We partnered with **ACRL** to make three awards for \$3000 each, done each Spring. We'll be announcing our winners for 2005 shortly after **ALA Midwinter**, and will present those awards at the **ACRL Conference** in Minneapolis in April. Past winners have included **Austin Community College**, **Cornell University** and **Baruch College**, and the pool of applicants for this year's awards is impressive. There is more information on this award and others at [www.ala.org/ACRL](http://www.ala.org/ACRL). We're very pleased to be able to support the missions of these institutions, including **ACRL**.

**ATG:** Can you comment on eBooks and the sale of eBooks? Is this increasing or are sales flat?

**PB:** eBooks have moved out of the experimental stage for many libraries, publishers and distributors. I hope you all saw the article in the *NY Times* (12/5/04 "An Idea Whose Time Has Come Back") this past weekend on the "arrival" of eBooks to the mainstream. The article specifically mentions that public libraries are embracing eBooks for a variety of reasons, such as cost, availability and functionality, and their patrons are too. Demand and usage is building in academic libraries, though the trends are harder to see since many eBooks are being packaged in collections, such as **Oxford University Press' Oxford Reference Online**. **Blackwell's Book Services** began offering digital reference management assistance as part of **Collection Manager** about 18 months ago, and we're seeing steadily increasing use of this functionality by our customers.

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**ATG:** Glad you mentioned digital reference — what do you see happening there? You recently spoke at the Australian Library and Information Association and had some encouraging words about the steady adoption of e-content by libraries and their users — is that still bearing out?

**PB:** I remain encouraged. The US-based Open eBook Forum reported in June '04 that eBook units sold for the first quarter 2004 were up 46% and eBook revenues were up 28% over the same quarter in 2003. I think many libraries are more eager now to make access a priority over ownership when it comes to reference. Our children that have grown up with handheld video games and camera phones will adopt eBooks at an even faster rate than current users. But don't look for print to die — there are just more formats now to share the market.

**ATG:** As we move toward the electronic world, are we moving toward a publisher selling model and away from the traditional book-seller? If so, is this a good thing? Can technology, federated and broadcast searching counteract the move toward the one-publisher model which seems to be developing or is this a transition?

**PB:** I believe there is room for multiple models, highly dependent on type of content, audience and subject matter. No matter what the format or delivery method is, excellent customer service is still the linchpin for successful bookselling. In some cases, a publisher may be able to provide that service directly to the users of its content, whether it is print or electronic. Then there are some market segments that are so specialized, such as the academic library niche, that many publishers still elect to use an agent like **Blackwell's Book Services** to reach and support that market.

## against the grain people profile

### Julie A. Carter

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**BORN & LIVED:** My hometown is Marshall, VA (50 miles west of Washington, DC) and I lived there for most of my formative years. I moved to Weaverville, NC after college and currently call Greenville, SC home.

**FAMILY:** My folks, Wallace and Shirley; A fiancé, Chris; and a hamster, Mina.

**EDUCATION:** I graduated from **Mars Hill College** with a Bachelor of Science in Zoology. I am currently enrolled in the MLIS program at the **University of South Carolina**.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** 1997-1998 Circulation Supervisor of Renfro Library at **Mars Hill College**; 1998-present Circulation Assistant of James B. Duke Library at **Furman University**.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO:** Play games (video, board, card), ice skate, be silly.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *The Color Purple* by **Alice Walker**.


**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD:** Socks with sandals.

**PHILOSOPHY:** Always laugh.

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:** To be gainfully employed as a reference librarian (in less than five years from now)!

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** From a library school perspective — the classes will continue to include core competencies but will focus on technology and its applications; there will also be an emphasis on collaboration and information fluency.

I'm not sure we'll ever see that one-publisher model fully develop. All the searching enhancements and latest technology will not change consumer behavior and attitude, which at this point seems to be rejecting the conglomerization of the publishing industry. We are seeing more

academic institutions taking publication of professional papers back into their own hands and making the decisions on when, where and how their content is accessed, which is proving to be a challenge for everyone involved — university presses, libraries, faculty and students! 

## Adventures in Librarianship — Our Mystifying Patrons

by **Ned Kraft** (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State) <kraftno@state.gov>

**ATG** staff would like to thank its public library colleagues for responding to our call for unusual community bulletin board announcements. It's been an amazing adventure for us, reading through the mountains of submissions. Taken in such a large dose, these announcements reminded us of the essential beauty, sincerity, and bewilderment of the family of man; especially that branch of the family which has few qualms about baring its soul on bulletin boards and reality shows.

To share-the-joy with our readers, here are some of our favorites. Names, phone numbers and email addresses have been obscured or creatively changed to... well, you know why.

**Lost Pet:** gorgeous white Pomeranian lost in the Hill's Grove neighborhood. Sweet tempered and trusting. Answers to the name of "Muggles." Please call 555-1234. Momma wants her baby back!

**Meeting of the Admiral Overton Society,** Tuesday, March 3rd, 7pm. Will discuss the Admiral's role in the Marimack, and his strained relationship with his father. Full regalia please! Meet at Barney's. Park in back to avoid scaring neighbors.

**For Sale:** Mountain bike, 26-inch frame, front shocks. This one's seen a lotta trails, dude! Busted my collar bone, Mom says she ain't afraid to toss her injured thirty-five year old son out on his xxx. So I gotta get my life straight, get a job. \$100, OBO. Rims are slightly bent but could be kicked back into place. Leave a note for "Crazy Dave." Phone's been turned off.

**Scruffy, matted, off-white Pomeranian** found in the Hill's Grove neighborhood. Snappish and ill-tempered. Tag just

says "Muggles." Please call 123-4567 ASAP. Our children are being traumatized.

**Sign up now for evening Gang-Zhou classes.** Improve your luck through the ancient art of pebble holding. Good for the liver. Makes you more attractive to the opposite sex. Guaranteed to boost your income by ten percent. Recent parolees are welcome. Call Raul at 987-6543.

**Under 35? Unhitched?** Saint Paul's United Presbyterian Church is forming a single's softball league. Come on! Meet new people, say a few prayers, have some good clean fun! Be at the VFW Memorial Hall at 10am on Saturday. No spikes. No fast pitch. And No feeling sorry for yourself! Divorcees should bring court documents.

**I buy wax of all colors.** Instead of throwing those candle butts away, call me, Crazy Dave, on my new cell phone! 456-7891. 